

AUTHORITIES FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on April 4, 2006, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing on "A Current Assessment of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Threats and Countermeasures."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on April 4, 2006, at 3 p.m., to conduct a hearing on "Reform of FHA's Title I Manufactured Housing Loan Programs."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation be authorized to meet on Tuesday, April 4, 2006, at 10 a.m. on TSA.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be authorized to meet during the session on Tuesday, April 4, 2006, at 10 a.m., in 215 Dirksen Senate Office Building, to hear testimony on "Preparing Your Taxes: How Costly Is It?"

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Select Committee on Intelligence be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on April 4, 2006, at 2:30 p.m. to hold a closed hearing.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS AND TERRORISM

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Tuesday, April 4, 2006, at 10 a.m., hold a closed briefing on Counterterrorism Priorities.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PERSONNEL

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Personnel be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on April 4, 2006, at 2:30 p.m., in open

session to continue to received testimony on health benefits and programs in review of the Defense authorization request for fiscal year 2007.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SEAPOWERS

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Seapower be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on April 4, 2006, at 3:30 p.m., in open session to receive testimony on the posture of the U.S. transportation command in review of the Defense authorization request for fiscal year 2007 and future years defense program.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

Mr. ALLARD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces be authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on April 4, 2006, at 10 a.m., in open session to receive testimony on missile defense programs in review of the Defense authorization request for fiscal year 2007.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator BAUCUS, I ask unanimous consent that the following list of fellows and interns with the Finance Committee staff be allowed on the Senate floor for the duration of debate on the immigration reform bill: Lesley Meeker, Britt Sandler, Lauren Shields, Laura Kellams, and Deidra Henry-Spires.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VOINOVICH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MEASURE PLACED ON CALENDAR—S. 598

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that calendar No. 374, S. 598, now be referred to the Banking Committee and then immediately discharged and placed on the calendar.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PROMOTING FREEDOM OF RELIGION IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr. BENNETT. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 421, which was submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 421) calling on the government of Afghanistan to uphold freedom of religion and urging the Government of the United States to promote religious freedom in Afghanistan.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in the past week, the world has witnessed the

arrest, the imprisonment, the threatened execution, and eventually the release of a man in Afghanistan named Abdul Rahman. His so-called crime? Apostasy. He was threatened with capital punishment because 16 years ago, while working on a humanitarian mission in Pakistan, he converted to Christianity.

Abdul Rahman has thankfully been released, and charges against him have been dropped. However, religious freedom remains in jeopardy in Afghanistan as do those who might choose to practice it.

I have great respect for President Karzai and the state he is trying to build. I respect the right of Afghanistan to its own laws and legal system.

But it will be a great tragedy if the overthrow of the Taliban government results in its replacement by a state that professes democracy but falls so far short of such an essential democratic standard: the freedom of belief.

We have over 22,000 troops in Afghanistan. Two hundred and eighty-two Americans have given their lives in that country since Operation Enduring Freedom began.

Freedom must, by definition, include freedom of religion.

It is our responsibility to make that utterly clear. As President Bush has stated, "We expect [the government of Afghanistan] to honor the universal principle of freedom. It is deeply troubling that a country we helped liberate would hold a person to account because they chose a particular religion over another."

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom raised concerns during the drafting of Afghanistan's constitution that it opened the door for cases such as this. Those concerns extend to both members of religious minorities and to members of the country's majority Muslim community who might dare to express an interpretation of Islam that differs from the prevailing orthodoxy. Sadly, these apprehensions have been borne out.

The State Department's International Religious Freedom Report for 2005 noted that conversion from Islam is "in theory" punishable by death in Afghanistan. Although charges against Mr. Rahman were fortunately dropped, clearly such a punishment is more than simply theoretical.

Afghanistan is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which reads in part, "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."

Today, I am introducing a resolution calling on the Government of Afghanistan to live up to the principles it has endorsed in that covenant. This resolution also urges the Government of Afghanistan to consider the importance

of religious freedom for the broader relationship between our two countries, and it expresses the sense of Congress that the President and his representatives should raise these human rights issues both publicly and privately.

In 1864, Abraham Lincoln wrote a grieving mother who had lost 5 sons in a single day in battle. He sought to offer her consolation for "so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom." Two hundred and eighty-two Americans have made that sacrifice in Afghanistan. Countless Afghans died in the struggle against Soviet invaders and others in resistance against the brutal regime of the Taliban. It is my fervent hope that Afghanistan lives up to the promise of its own pledge to uphold human rights: freedom of worship must be part of any true enduring freedom.

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating thereto be printed in the RECORD as if read.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 421) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. RES. 421

Whereas under the Taliban Government of Afghanistan, individuals convicted of promoting faiths other than Islam, or expressing interpretations of Islam differing from the prevailing orthodoxy, could be imprisoned and those converting from Islam could be tortured and publicly executed;

Whereas the United States has more than 22,000 members of the Armed Forces stationed in Afghanistan and whereas 282 members of the Armed Forces have given their lives in Afghanistan since Operation Enduring Freedom began in that country;

Whereas Abdul Rahman, a citizen of Afghanistan, was arrested and accused of apostasy for converting to Christianity 16 years ago and threatened with execution;

Whereas the prosecutor in this case, Abdul Wasi, stated in court that Abdul Rahman "is known as a microbe in society, and he should be cut off and removed from the rest of Muslim society and should be killed.";

Whereas, while it was a welcome development that charges against Abdul Rahman were dropped, he was forced to seek asylum in Italy;

Whereas, despite his release, religious freedom and those who would practice it in Afghanistan remain in jeopardy;

Whereas religious freedom is a fundamental principle of democracy;

Whereas the Constitution of Afghanistan does not fully guarantee freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief;

Whereas, on several occasions throughout Afghanistan's constitution drafting process, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom raised concerns that the constitution's ambiguity on issues of conversion and religious expression could lead to unjust criminal accusations against Muslims and non-Muslims alike;

Whereas charges of blasphemy since 2002 have justified those concerns;

Whereas the International Religious Freedom Report 2005 published by the Depart-

ment of State does not list Afghanistan among those countries cited for "State Hostility Toward Minority or Nonapproved Religions", "State Neglect of Societal Discrimination or Abuses Against Religious Groups", or "Discriminatory Legislation or Policies Prejudicial to Certain Religions" and notes that "[t]he new Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice";

Whereas the International Religious Freedom Report 2005 states that conversion from Islam is "in theory - punishable by death" in Afghanistan;

Whereas the case of Abdul Rahman, other instances of religious persecution or discrimination against minorities, and ambiguities within the Constitution of Afghanistan appear to warrant closer scrutiny in the International Religious Freedom Report 2006; and

Whereas Afghanistan is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which reads in part, "Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching."; Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That—

(1) the Senate—

(A) recognizes freedom of religion as a central tenet of democracy;

(B) respects the right of the people of Afghanistan to self-government, while strongly urging the Government of Afghanistan to respect all universally recognized human rights;

(C) condemns the arrest of Abdul Rahman and other instances of religious persecution in Afghanistan;

(D) commends the dropping of charges against Abdul Rahman; and

(E) strongly urges the Government of Afghanistan to consider the importance of religious freedom for the broader relationship between the United States and Afghanistan; and

(2) it is the sense of the Senate that the President and the President's representatives should—

(A) in both public and private fora, raise concerns at the highest levels with the Government of Afghanistan regarding the violations of internationally recognized human rights, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, in Afghanistan; and

(B) ensure that the International Religious Freedom Report 2006 for Afghanistan fully addresses the issue of religious persecution in that country, including the arrest of Abdul Rahman.

NATIONAL AND GLOBAL YOUTH SERVICE DAY

Mr. BENNETT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 422, which was submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 422) designating April 21, 2006, as National and Global Youth Service Day, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I rise to support a resolution designating

April 21, 2006, as National and Global Youth Service Day. This resolution recognizes and commends the significant community service efforts that youth are making in communities across the country and around the world on April 21 and every day. This resolution also encourages the citizens of the United States to acknowledge and support these volunteer efforts.

National and Global Youth Service Day is an annual public awareness and education campaign that highlights the valuable contributions that young people make to their communities throughout the year. On this day, youth from across the United States and the world will carry out community service projects in areas ranging from hunger to literacy to the environment. Through this service, many will embark on a lifelong path of service and civic engagement in more than 100 countries around the world.

In Alaska, the following groups will engage youth in community service activities in observance of National and Global Youth Service Day:

One, Anchorage's Promise, which works to mobilize all sectors of the community to build the character and competence of Anchorage's children and youth by fulfilling Five Promises: Caring Adults, Safe Places, Healthy Start, Equitable Education for Marketable Skills, and Opportunities to Serve, is sponsoring the annual Kids' Day event. Over 20 interactive exhibits will be staffed by youth, including booths where young people can see how easily an egg cracks without wearing a seatbelt, discover why bike helmets are important, and see just how clean their hands really are.

Two, eighth graders from the Neon Team at Goldenview Middle School in Anchorage are creating colorful cards with spring-themed haiku poems. At least 120 students will donate cards to social service agencies, hospitals, and community support organizations throughout Anchorage. The purpose of this project is to spread Springtime cheer to those in the Anchorage community who may not otherwise experience a joyful Spring.

Three, members of Alaska Youth for Environmental Action, a statewide youth organization associated with the National Wildlife Federation, are developing a project to inform and involve youth in the use of energy efficient light bulbs. Young people throughout the State will petition their local communities for support and will encourage the use of energy efficient light bulbs.

Many similar and wonderful activities will be taking place all across the Nation.

I thank my colleagues—Senators AKAKA, ALLEN, BAUCUS, BAYH, BOXER, BUNNING, BURR, CANTWELL, CLINTON, COCHRAN, COLEMAN, COLLINS, CORNYN, CRAIG, DODD, DOLE, DOMENICI, DORGAN, DURBIN, FEINGOLD, FEINSTEIN, HAGEL, ISAKSON, JOHNSON, KENNEDY, KERRY, LANDRIEU, LAUTENBERG, LEVIN, LIEBERMAN, LOTT, MARTINEZ, MENENDEZ, MIKULSKI, MURRAY, NELSON of Florida, NELSON of Nebraska, SALAZAR, SANTORUM, SNOWE, SPECTER, STABENOW, and STEVENS—for standing with me as original cosponsors of this worthwhile legislation, which will ensure that youth across the country and the world know that all of their hard work is greatly appreciated.